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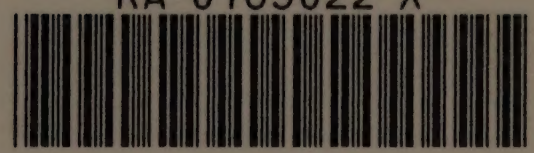
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COLLECTED ESSAYS

COLLECTED
ESSAYS PAPERS &c.
of
ROBERT BRIDGES

II
HUMDRUM & HARUM-SCARUM
A LECTURE ON FREE VERSE

III
POETIC DICTION

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TABLE OF THE NEW SYMBOLS USED

IN the first essay (see Preface thereto)

(1) \dot{e} for the diphthongal sound in *eye* and *right*.

(2) 'soft' and 'hard' G were distinguished.

(3) η for the modified *n* in *-ing*.

In the following essays, II and III, the sounds represented in ordinary spelling by A are differentiated thus:

(4) *a* = the *a* of *father* (this is the true Romance A).

(5) *a* = the *a* of *hat*.

(6) *a* or *ay* = the *a* of *slave*. This symbol is made by a ligature of the two vowels which compose the sound; viz. the *e* of *bed* and the *i* of *in*, as they appear in the words *rein* and *they*: such correctly spelt words are of course left unchanged. The modification of this sound before *r*, as in *various*, will be a rule of pronunciation, as also the effect of *qu* and *w* on the following vowel.

(7) *a'* = the *a* in *almighty*.

(8) *av* = the same sound which occurs as *au* or *aw* in *autumn* and *awl*.

Note: The reader is reminded that inconsistencies must occur in avoiding the confusion which would arise from using the symbols in words which require other new symbols to complete them. Such words are left in their old dress until they can be completely provided. Also note that the final *e* which is always mute, except in a few foreign words, is omitted where its presence would wrongly imply the lengthening of the preceding vowel, as in *liv*, *hav*, *colleg*. This simple advantage cannot be made use of in words where the preceding vowel is mis-spelt, as in *dove*.

Capitals are not dealt with and illustrative quotations are given in the original spelling.

Any oversights in the text will not affect the purpose of the experiment.

II

HUMDRUM AND HARUM-SCARUM

A LECTURE ON FREE VERSE

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II

HUMDRUM AND HARUM-SCARUM

A LECTURE ON FREE VERSE

WHEN I was invited last term to discuss some poetical subject before a literary society in my old colleg in Oxford, it seem'd to me that the question of Free Verse would suit the occasion; and havin^g well consider'd the matter for that select audience, I am now summarizⁱⁿg my discourse as lucidly as I can for a wider public.

First of a'll it is expedient to get rid of the word Poetry. I shall not discuss the difference between poetry and prose,¹ but merely the distinctiv forms of verse and prose. The term Free Verse impli^{es} that it is with form that we hav to deal, and not with content; and my procedure will be to try to discover the meanin^g of the term Free Verse, and then to show some of the results that must follow from writin^g in the new or free manner so describ'd or imagin'd.

¹Argument with those terms somet^{imes} takes the followin^g form:

‘Verse is poetical rhythm;

All imaginativ prose is poetical;

It is a'lso rhythmical;

Therefore, a'll imaginativ prose is verse=free verse. Q. E. D.

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Tho' I wish to confine myself to English Free Verse, one cannot treat the subject at all without reference to French vers libre; because in France the revolt against the traditional form is in its threats and promises very similar to our own, and the theory of it has been more intelligently handled and analys'd there than by English critics, the best of whom borrow their reasonings, so far as I can find, from the French. I do not see that we have in England any definite or logical notion of Free Verse distinct from the French, nor that, as far as theory goes, there can really be any difference.

The impulse of the movement is admitted to be a widespread conviction that the old metrical forms and prosodies are exhausted. Thus Mr. Flint, who is well acquainted with the French movement and has long been keeping us in touch with contemporary French verse, writes in his Other World Cadences one sentence of his creed,—

'That Rhyme and Metre are artificial and external additions to Poetry, and that as the various changes that can be run upon them were work'd out, they grew more and more insipid until they have become contemptible and encumbering.'

One could not subscribe to this formula without recasting it, but its exaggerations represent, as I take it, merely an emotional quality in the writer's true conviction.

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The word free in 'free verse' means escape from something, and that something is the old metrical forms and prosodies. And now having cautiously taken this first step on to solid ground, we shall naturally ask whether, having discarded the old forms, we are to have any new forms, or whether 'freedom' is merely absence of all form. And since formlessness can have no place in Art, and since any discussion on the nature of free verse implies some form in it, however critics may have failed to define it, we may assume that, besides the negative quality of lacking all the distinctions of metrical verse, there must be some positive quality imagined for it by which it will be distinguishable from prose.

And besides the determination to escape from metre, there is also another point on which all free versifiers agree, namely, that free verse must be rhythmical (conveniently used for eurhythmic), nor does any one doubt what is meant by rhythm. Rhythm is in fact difficult to define, but it is easily felt, though the faculty for feeling it varies immensely. Here it is enough to say that it is more than mere movement; it is rather a co-ordination of movements that appeals to the feelings or emotions; and if prose were not rhythmical we should here have the differentiation of verse from prose. But good prose is also rhythmical, so that

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our question about rhythm must take this form, namely, whether there is any difference between the rhythms of verse and prose, and if so, what that difference is.

Now it would seem clear that the main formal difference between the rhythms of prose and metrical verse was due to the prosody; and since that, being discarded, can no longer serve for a distinction, it will follow that, if there is to be any distinction between the rhythms of prose and free verse, it must be a more subtle affair.

The main effectual difference between the rhythms of the old metrical verse and of fine prose is, that in the verse you have a greater expectancy of the rhythm; and that comes of the rhythms being more mark'd and predetermin'd and confin'd; and the poet's art was to vary the expected rhythm as much as he could without disagreeably baulking the expectation. This expectancy appears in the critical attitude of the hearer towards the more irregular verses of a poem. In prose this sort or grade of expectancy was absent and even forbidden, and however much the orator's art led you to welcome the sequence of his phrases, and however satisfied you might be when they disclosed themselves, yet they did not seem predetermin'd.¹ Thus if a sentence in an old

¹Dr. Blass on the Greek orators, with Aristotle and Dionysius, supplies illustration of the Greek practice of hybrid forms.

text were deleted you could not supply the lost rhythms in a prose passage so confidently as you might in a poem, where the metre prescribed certain necessities.

It follows from this that what is verse to some hearers is prose to others; and since there is no short speech-rhythm in prose which might not be used as a metrical rhythm or a part of some metrical system, the only difference would seem to be that in prose the rhythms were not evident or repeated; if repeated you would come to expect them.

Now if we should take on the one hand some fine passage of English prose, and on the other some fine passage of our old metrical verse, and regard them as typical extremes, it is plain that between their markedly different rhythmical effects—one of which we recognize as prose and the other as verse—a wide field lies in which it is possible to construct something that would be neither the one nor the other. And free verse will be an expatiation of some kind in this field; and it may be claimed, as I think it is imagined, that such an intermediate form may combine some of the advantages of both systems: it might possess in some measure the freedom of prose and the expectancy of the old verse: but we should be prepared to find that in discarding the distinctions which perfected the old types, it lost their most forcible characteristics.

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A French writer, to whom I shall return, argues thus: The old poetic verse, he says, marches along by virtue of its common-speech units, the rhythm of which is chosen to enforce or vary the metrical lines. And he contends with Mr. Flint that the beauty of the rhythms lies wholly in the speech-rhythms: they are the essence of the thing, and we do not need the metrical units, which may be regarded, almost historically, as a scaffolding for the building that has been erected, and having now served their purpose, they may be removed and permit the rhythmic building to stand clear.

This is intelligible enough: I wrote myself (in Milton's Prosody),—

'It might be possible, as it is certainly conceivable, to base the whole art of versification on speech-rhythm, and differentiate the prosodies secondarily by their various qualities of effect upon the speech. But no one has ever attempted that.'

And now, quoting myself, I see that I had no right to say that the attempt had never been made, for of course I cannot know, tho' I am convinced that the task lies beyond our power. But it is plain that the establishment of speech-rhythm as the rule of free verse would, if it should arrive at any rules, be a first step towards such a fundamental

analysis, and we shall now hav to examin that step as the theorists hav made it.

The French critic, M. Dujardin, whom I hav quoted above (*Les Premiers Poètes du Vers Libre*, in the *Mercure de France*), has a full knowledge of the subject: he wr̄tes with authority and it seems to me with common sense, gr̄at ability and sound logic: I shall take his analysis as a basis. (a) He assumes that one can recogn̄ze good prose when one sees it,¹ and that it is possible to wr̄te a prose poem, i.e. to wr̄te 'poetry' in prose. But that is not free verse. (b) He is ālso in m̄ opinion qūite r̄ght when he further asserts that the 'verses' of the Bible hav given r̄se to a unique impression which, havin̄ been consciously and unconsciously copied, has created a distinct recogn̄zable form. And this is a h̄brid: it is not free verse. (c) He recogn̄zes the habit of introducin̄ irregularity into the old metrical forms, i.e. wr̄tin̄ the old metres so that they do not scan. This, which is common in France, is the commonest k̄nd of incompetent technique in English poets of whatever st̄le at the present t̄me. This

¹The fact that it would be equally true to say that it is impossible to draw the l̄ne between prose and verse (as appears throughout this discussion) does not invalidate M. Dujardin's assumption. No l̄ne can be drawn between the animal and vegetable k̄ndoms, but we do not for that reason den̄ the typical distinction between a l̄on and an oak tree.

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again is not free verse. (Under this head would fall the Vers Libéré of modern French, the Prose Cadencée ou Vers Libres of Molière [Malade Imaginaire], and, I suppose, the blank verse passages of Dickens's prose.) (d) And to these three I must add a fourth, a form of verse which perhaps is not yet recogniz'd in French tho' it is common with us, viz. Irregular accentual verse. This is not free verse in the proper sense of that term, because it really conforms, or should conform, to definit metrical laws, which allow indeed any irregularity of length in the line but somewhat confine the rhythms to very various but still definit forms.

M. Dujardin then describes what the elements of the new verse, i.e. rhythm without metre, must logically be. Since the elements of the new verse can no longer be the syllabic feet of the metrical system, they must (he says) be the rhythmic sense-units which are in revolt against them: and so (a) A line of free verse is a grammatical unit or unity, made of accentual verbal units combining to a rhythmical import, complete in itself and sufficient in itself; (b) the line may be various in length, and of any length, only not too long; (c) the line is absolutely indifferent to syllabic numeration or construction apart from its own propriety of sense and pleasant movement; (d) and being free

from all metrical obligations, such as caesura, hiatus, &c., these and all other artifices proper to metrical prosodies are forbidden to it.

The above statement does not seem to me to be open to objection: it is a competent description of the trend of experiments, justifying their successes and discriminating their inconsistencies and errors. We may provisionally accept it with confidence: but M. Dujardin leaves us after all with no other distinction made between prose and free verse but this, namely, that free verse is made up of short sections or lines which are in themselves accentual and grammatical unities: and it is in this description, which does not fit prose, that we must look to find the distinctiv positiv quality of free verse.

The independent formal existence of prose is not denied on any hand. Mr. Flint, with whose opinions I hold much in common, and who appears here to be at one with M. Dujardin, distinguishes 'prose' from 'cadenced prose', and seems to imply that all 'cadenced prose' is free verse. Thus he says 'Cadence should not be printed as prose', and, as I read him, he notes this undefin'd term 'cadenced' to be the distinction between prose and verse. That, or any other term, would be useful and serve for a name if it were so defin'd as to distinguish the prose rhythms which without

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damag can be represented in short sections, from those which cannot: and I should no doubt agree with Mr. Flint. He has not, however, made this distinction clear, and it is the very point at issue, the positiv definition which we are seekin^g. And if distinction exists it should be easy to demonstrate it by quotin^g a specimen of good prose and exposin^g the characteristics; eny passag of fine prose should serve. I take one from Bacon:

'As if there were sought in knowledge a cowch wher-upon to rest a searching and restlesse spirite; or a tar-rasse for a wandring and variable minde, to walke up and downe with a fair prospect; or a Tower of State for a proude minde to raise it selfe upon; or a Fort or commanding ground for strife and contention, or a Shoppe for profite or sale; and not a rich Store-house for the glorie of the Creator and the reliefe of mans estate.'

Or agein this:

'We see in Needle-works and Embroyderies, it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a lightsome ground. Judg therefore of the pleasure of the Heart, by the pleasure of the Eye.'

I assert of these passages that they cannot be printed in

short sections as free verse without damag and absurdity. Let the reader try his hand on them.

And certainly much well-written free verse, in which the lines are of varyin length and rhythm, is not good prose. However irregular the lines be, they are conscious of their length: they pose with a sort of independence and self-sufficiency: and whare the verse is most successful its cadences provoke too much of the expectancy of verse to appear so wholly free from restraint as the best prose can: and it is right enough to call it verse rather than prose. And if it is quite satisfactory—as in short poems it very well may be—it is so by virtue of the poet's sensibility to rhythmical form, and by his mastery of it; and he will so combine his rhythms that they do create expectancy as they proceed: indeed I do not doubt that a free-verse poet would regard the pleasure which accompanies this satisfg'd expectancy, as a note of his success.

Now in so far as this free verse (or cadenced prose) actually creates this expectancy, its rhythms can no doubt be analys'd and reduced to rule. What generally satisfies the ear does so by some principle or law; and the simplest, the commonest and most pervadin conditions will soon be recogniz'd; and they would be the simplest elements of any possible reduction of all verse rhythms to one sys-

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tem. The writer of free verse cannot escape from this: indeed his rejection of metre is bas'd on the recognition of rhythms: he claims for them that they are the fundamental, overruling things. He has cast off his visible chains but has not escap'd into liberty. If he is a law unto himself, he is so only by unconscious obligation to a wider law to which he has appeal'd. But then comes the unavoidable consideration, of what nature are these effects which he is aiming at, and on which he relies? That he can rely on them implies that they are what other ears are prepar'd to accept, and such effects can only be the primary movements of rhythm upon which all verse has always depended, and which, on his own assumption, poets have elaborated into the perfected metrical forms which he repudiates.

If ever he become conscious of this, then the purity of his art must appear to him as a sort of protestantism, hamper'd by negative prescriptions and tabulated prejudices: he will be constantly engag'd in deliberately avoiding reminiscences and in disguising essential similarities. And a great deal of 'free verse' has been easily analys'd into the disguise of old forms.

It is open to the advocate of free verse to object to all this. He may repudiate expectancy and say that it is one of the things that he wishes to be rid of, and that it will not

be present in free verse. On my own showing it would be a subtle and hidden quality, but none the less I doubt not of its cause or effect, and I believe that it is the force which will hold his free verse together and distinguish it from prose, and I think that free verse is good and theoretically defensible only in so far as it can create expectancy without the old metrical devices. If it fails to effect this, it seems to me but a broken jerky sort of bad prose: and the old fluent prose needs not me nor any one else to defend it from those who would cut it to pieces and call its fragments verse.

But whether or no a free versifier repudiate expectancy, he must renounce certain other advantages of the metrical system, the value of which is so great that it is difficult to believe that they can have been duly appreciated by the men who would cast them contemptuously away.

I will describe as briefly as I can a few of the adverse conditions which must result from rejecting the metrical systems, and for sake of clearness will name four of them thus:

- (1) Loss of carrying power.
- (2) Self-consciousness.
- (3) Sameness of line structure.
- (4) Indetermination of subsidiary 'accent'.

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First, loss of carrying power. Almost all the power that great poets like Homer and Dante have of poetizing whatever they may handle is due to their fix'd prosodies. If this should be doubted, suppose the experiment of rewriting their poems so that they did not scan. It would of course be mere destruction, and observe, destruction not only of the great immortal lines where the magical concurrence of high diction with metrical form stands out in a clear configuration of beauty that makes them unforgettable and has enshrined them among the treasures of every cultured mind, but the mortar also between the stones, which is now hardly distinguishable from them, would perish and rot away, and would no longer serve to hold the fabric together. A single example will be sufficient: Dante, who was careful to open his cantos effectively, does not scruple to begin the third canto of the Purgatory with a piece of narrative business that Cary, who had no metric skill, represents in his translation by this flat and awkward line:

Them sudden flight had scatter'd o'er the plain,
but the Italian is

Avvegnachè la subitana fuga

Dispergesse color per la campagna:

and one might almost say that the *Commedia* does not contain lines of greater dignity. The diction, rhythm and

sonority are carried by the versification without a trace of pomposity or affectation; and depriv'd of that resource, free verse must be full of disconsolat patches, for it has no correspondin machinery to carry the subordinat matter.

Second, self-consciousness. It seems very clear to me that free verse as defin'd cannot be written without the appearance of self-consciousness. The conditions are these: Each line or phrase has (ex hypothesi) to show convincin propriety of diction and rhythm, together with other proprieties of relativ length, sonority and poetic value. Now this is frankly impossible; what may conceivably be done in Gaelic, Hindustani or the languages of the Pacific Islanders, I do not know; but English was not made for it and cannot do it. The writer of free verse confronted by a thousand obstacles will, in a poem of eny length, whenever his matter lacks poetic content, be at his wit's end to devise somethin passable; and his readers or hearers, if they be intelligent, will observe him with amusement, and he himself, bein presumably intelligent, will be uncomfortably aware of the situation; for while pretendin honest aesthetic rightness he will know that he is only providin ingenious make-shifts which he would hav been glad to avoid.

The happy and not too rare gift of believin that whatever you choose to say must be worth sayin, can indeed save

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a man from self-consciousness, and set his work beneath criticism.

Now this situation is created by free verse; the old metrical system was design'd to obviate it, for therein the poet did not choose his form to suit every special turn and item of his matter, but adapted his matter to the exigencies of a prescrib'd form; and in doing this he found a further reward, because the changes of his matter provoked and justify'd all the varieties of rhythm that his metre allow'd, so that their desirable irregularities came spontaneously, and his metrical form, harmonizing whatever he had to deal with, offer'd him endless opportunities for unexpected beauties. The metre was like a rich state uniform, robed in which any man will feel equally at ease whether walking in the gaze of a vulgar crowd, or sustaining the delicate dignity of a court ceremony.

Third, same-ness of grammatical line. The identification of the line unit with the grammatical unit must limit the varieties of line-structure. This feature of the free verse is not unlike the common-sense attempt of many modern song-writers to identify their musical phrase with the speech-rhythm of the words. I have made no examination of the practice of writers in this respect, and shall only be theorizing in the following remarks.

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The grammatical forms of sentences in English are few, and must repeat themselves again and again; and each form has its proper and natural inflection of voice which, however overlaid, will impose its typical intonation on the sentence. Now if the grammatical forms are made coincident with the lines of the verse, they must impose the recurrence of their similar intonations upon the lines.

It would be easy to quote some passage of free verse which exhibited this kind of monotony, but it would be unfair because it could be match'd by similar examples from metrical poems. Indeed the best metrical poetry respects the grammar so strictly that much of it complies fully with M. Dujardin's rule, and might be quoted as typical free verse, were it not for the negative rule that forbids its metre. Moreover monotony of this kind is often agreeable in itself, and sought for its special effect. None the less, one of the difficulties in writing good verse of any kind is to escape from the tyranny of these recurrent speech-forms, and the restriction imposed by the rules of free verse must make that difficulty immeasurably greater.

Since the aim and boast of free verse is that it will attain spontaneity and variety, I wonder at myself finding it in danger of self-consciousness and monotony of form.

Fourth, indetermination of subsidiary accent. Metrical

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verse has the power of determinin^g and relatin^g the subordinat or ambiguous accentuations in a rhythmical phrase; and the essential value of this resource seems to hav^e been disregarded b^y the advocates of free verse.

A poem in metre has a predetermin'd organic normal scheme for its lines, and whatever their varieties of rhythm no line can be constructed without reference to its form: hence the same syllabic rhythms acquire different values according to their place in the line. The indefinable delicacy of this power over the hidden possibilities of speech is what most invites and rewards the artist in his technique, as the ignorance, neglect or abuse of it makes the chief badness of bad work. Its subtleties mock illustration, but demonstration can be simple and even commonplace. The second book of Paradise Lost opens thus:

*High on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outshon the wealth of Ormus and of Ind.*

These are two lines of blank verse, but they can be written as two lines of free verse thus:

*High on a Throne of Royal State,
Which far outshon the wealth of Ormus and of Ind.*

Now in writin^g and readin^g them thus, the value of the word far is lost: it is seen that the word cannot in itself deter-

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min for itself any special value; in the free verse it is flat and dull, and one does not know what to do with it, for if it be unaccented it is useless, and if accented it is foolish. Indeed, no accentuation can restore to it what it has lost.

This one example is enough to show what is intended in this section, but another will lead further, and the passage which I quoted in my Milton's Prosody, to exhibit how he broke up his lines, will serve well: in *Paradise Lost*, iii, 37 seq.:

Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
Tunes her nocturnal Note. Thus with the Year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn.

These lines are greatly admired; a critic would hardly accuse them of prosaic or dull diction. But now set them out as free verse:

Then feed on thoughts,
That voluntarie move harmonious numbers;
As the wakeful Bird sings darkling,
And in shadiest Covert hid
tunes her nocturnal Note.

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Thus with the Year seasons return,

But not to me returns Day,

Or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn.

The very diction of the verses has suffer'd terribly. I doubt if I should have seen any merit in them had I read them thus in the free verse of a contemporary poet. If this be so it follows that diction in free verse will needs be far more exacting than the diction of metrical verse. It must be more beautiful in itself, because it has relinquish'd the technique of one of the main sources of its beauty.

A free versifier may welcome this situation, and say that his poetry will be the better for excluding phrases that are in themselves so little beautiful that they must borrow adventitious beauty from mechanical devices. Well and good—if he can justify himself: but language is refractory, and all technique in Art consists in devices for the mastering of obstinate material. If free verse must of its nature be more beautiful than metrical verse, let us rejoice and wait patiently. It is a case of *solvitur ambulando*, perhaps one should say *volando* or *volitando*.

I have myself made so many experiments that I cannot be suspected of wishing to discourage others. No art can flourish that is not alive and growing, and it can only grow by invention of new methods or by discovery of new

material. In the art of English verse my own work has led me to think that there is a wide field for exploration in the metrical prosody, and that in carrying on Milton's inventions in the syllabic verse there is better hope of successful progress than in the technique of free verse as I understand it.

III

POETIC DICTION IN ENGLISH

FIRST PRINTED

The Forum

May 1923

III

POETIC DICTION IN ENGLISH

POETIC Diction is a wide subject, and this paper will deal with only one little corner of it; it will examine the dislike which poets of to-day exhibit towards the traditional forms: and since even this, to be thorough, would involve a completer description of the traditional forms than a short discourse allows of, we must be contented to outline the situation with a few typical illustrations.

The revolt against the old diction is a reaction which in its general attitude is rational: and it is in line with the reaction of 'The Lake School' of Poetry, familiar to all students in Wordsworth's statement, and Coleridge's criticism and correction of that statement in his 'Biographia Literaria'. Both movements alike protest against all archaisms of vocabulary and grammar and what are called literary forms, and plead for the simple terms and direct forms of common speech.

As my method is to be by illustration, I will begin with an extreme example, Milton's Lycidas, a poem which tho' Dr. Johnson's common-sense condemn'd it without

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reserve, has in spite of the extravagance of its conventions grown in favour, and firmly holds its claim to be one of the most beautiful of the great masterpieces of English verse.

Only a few days ago I received a new German translation of it, in the preface where to it is stated to be 'Ein Gipfel, vielleicht der Gipfel aller schäferlichen, aller Renaissance-lyrik, unerreicht die Schönheit u. s. w.'

The undisguised conventionality of *Lycidas* is sufficiently obvious in its properties. Muses, Fauns, Satyrs and Nymphs, with Druids and River-gods associate with St. Peter and the Pope, and in their company a new River-god, Camus, invented on a bogus etymology: but the remoteness from common-sense which offended Dr. Johnson can be fully exposed by quoting a single line: the poet bewailing the death of a colleg friend by shipwreck in the Irish Channel, concludes the section of his lament over the unburied body in these words:

And O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth!

We have to face the fact that this strange and meaningless invocation does not sound frigid or foolish in the poem. Rather it is evident that it was the very strength of the poet's feeling that has forced the transmutation of his memories and of the practical aspects of life into a dreamy passionate flux, where all is so heightened and inspired that we do not

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wonder to find embedded therein the clear prophecy of a conspicuous historical event: tho' the whole of literature can scarcely show any comparable example.

This is poetic magic. Certainly it was not to common-sense that Milton turn'd for consolation; and a work of sheer beauty was the only worthy offering that Poetry could make.

After reading Lycidas let us see how it is with Shelley's Adonais. Tho' as a whole this poem cannot compete with Milton, yet it contains lines and passages of unsurpassable beauty, both of diction and verse, and it is worthy to be compar'd; and since (especially towards the end) it is in closer contact with our natural expression of feeling, it appeals more strongly to some tastes. Well, the properties are as literary as in Milton. We have the Muses and Urania: Milton's 'where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep?' becomes 'where wert thou mighty Mother, when he lay?' and in company with Urania we have Albion and Cain and Apollo and the Wandering Jew and living persons, all magisterially blended by Shelley's usual phantasmagoria. And in one respect he is even more conventional or pedantic than Milton, because he borrows more directly from his Greek models, and with marvellous Englishing makes Hellenic beauties his own. Moreover he works Bion's machinery: Aphrodite bewailing Adonis becomes

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Urania bewailing Keats—the difference in the circumstances needing all the resources of his free symbolism to adapt it. We must not, however, be led away from the question of mere diction, and I mention'd this point merely to show that Shelley's diction is more conventional than Milton's and sometimes when it least appears to be so, because many of its beauties are more directly borrow'd. He has, indeed, no one line to match Milton's call to the dolphins, but many which common-sense would rate as equally extravagant.

Thirdly, let us look at Arnold's *Thyrsis*, a Victorian poem in direct line with *Lycidas* and *Adonais*, consciously affiliated with them and plainly inspir'd by Milton. I remember many years ago how Ingram Bywater, when we were both young, contended against me that *Thyrsis* was as good a poem as *Lycidas*: I do not know how far he was in earnest.

Now in Arnold's poem he and his friend are Corydon and *Thyrsis*, they have their shepherd's pipes, and the Hellenic properties are practically the same as Milton's and Shelley's; but they are frankly set in a modern English landscape and introduced naturally as actual figures of the mental world wherein the two friends had liv'd and loved. Their mutual sympathy in this symbolism makes it possible almost to confound Enna with Cumnor, and that is

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skilfully accomplish'd, but amid the strong details of native colour and homely affections we have an Ionian folk-tale of obscure antiquity, the relevancy of which is hardly clear'd up by a long note. Since there is no trace of Christian symbolism in the poem, the Properties are simpler than Milton's or Shelley's, and the Diction may be styled Wordsworthian; it would hardly have offended Dr. Johnson: it is plainly not intended to be in what Arnold has call'd 'the grand style', and he was never in danger of attempting Shelley's heavenward flights, which he thought ineffectual. Thus we may say that, compar'd with Lycidas and Adonais, Arnold's Thyrsis is in simplifi'd diction.

What then is the effect of such a diction? In judging this we must remember that Arnold is not Milton, and I am probably myself too much bias'd in favour of the grater poet: but if a 'rational' diction is any decided poetic advantage, then that advantage should appear, whereas the impression that Thyrsis makes on me when I compare it with Lycidas is that it lacks in passion, as if it were a handling of emotions rather than the compelling utterance of them, and so far as that must have the effect of insincerity it is the last thing that we should expect from the exclusion of conventions. It does not carry the same conviction of distress that Lycidas does; neither the friendship nor the

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sorrow seems so profound, and the whole poem, tho' it is agreeable reading, leaves one cold at the end. This might in great part be accounted for by its fanciful argument and by the poet's mentality, nor can I pretend to decide how much is due to the diction: the example must remain a negative one; but in illustration, I will quote a passage from *Thyrsis* where Arnold follows Milton in moralizing on the 'vanity' of the sincerest human effort in the search for ideal Truth; he has

This does not come with houses or with gold,
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew;
'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold!
But the smooth-slipping weeks
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired;
Out of the heed of mortals he is gone,
He wends unfollow'd, he must house alone;
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired.

Milton has

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of Noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears,

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And slits the thinspun life, 'But not the praise,'

Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears. . . .

and so on, and this in spite of old Phoebus and the bad grammatical inversion in the first line.

It is difficult to dissociate the quality of Diction from two other matters, namely, Properties and Keeping. Properties is a term borrow'd from the stage. The mixture of Greek and Christian types in Lycidas and Adonais is a good example of Properties. The term Keeping is taken from Peintin, and has no convenient synonym, but it may be explain'd as the harmonizinz of the artistic medium, and since Diction is the chief means in the harmonizinz of Properties, it would seem that any restriction or limitation of the Diction must tend to limit the Properties, since without artistic keeping their absurdities would be exposed.

Dr. Johnson's common-sense might contend that all Properties were absurd if their absurdity were merely disguised by Keeping. But in aesthetic no Property is absurd if it is in Keeping. This does not decide what Properties should be used. Different Properties are indispensable for different imaginativ effects. Good Keeping is a first essential in all good writin, and especially in poetry. Perhaps it is evident here that the poorer the Properties are, the less call will they make on diction for their keeping, altho' the simplest

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Properties are on their own plane no less exigent: and again the higher the poet's command of diction, the wider may be the field of his Properties. Also, and this is a very practical point, if a writer with no command of imaginative diction should use such Properties as are difficult of harmonization, he will discredit both the Properties and the Diction.

This is as it should be. In all fields of Art the imitators are far more numerous than the artists, and they will copy the externals, in poetry the Versification and the Diction, which in their hands become futile. Criticism does not assist art by exposing such incompetencies: nor can it be praised for philanthropic intention, because dabbling in the arts is one of the most harmless pleasures of life: there may be more to be said for it than for dabbling in criticism as I am doing here.

We may now fairly put the following question: Is this protest against poetic diction intended to confine Properties to actualities? No poet would consent to that. Is it then merely a protest against archaic and literary forms of speech? Supposing this to be intended, we may enquire how far it can, on any poetic plane, be practically enforced. We cannot hope to get very far through with this business, but we can insert the thin end of the wedge.

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The adverb *hither* has gon a/lmost entirely out of use in common speech, and except in the idiom 'hither and thither' is rarely found in modern prose. Yet tho' obsolescent it is without obscurity and is a pretty word. No purist in diction coud object to it.

And if *hither* be admitted, what of wherein, where-to, whereby, &c. To forbid them and insist on the a/lternatives in which, to which, by which, &c., would discredit eny honest grammarian; his hope would be that familiarity with the better and more convenient forms in poetry might lead to their more frequent use in prose, and that they might thus, through the journals and current literature, win restoration into our common speech.

But if it should happen that such simple obsolescent forms actually became quite common agein, it is certain that they would lose some of their poetic and literary value, and a wrīter who had meintein'd his elevation partly on such cheap stilts would miss them and unconsciously feel about for somethin, to take their place. And their natural substitutes would be other words which had the same obsolescent quality as his old friends used to hav before they had been too familiariz'd. One can imagin that this process of restorin, good obsolescent forms might thus go on ad infinitum. On the other hand, as

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things are now, the self-denial of our common speech may be regarded as the generous and jealous gardian of our literary style.

Since poetic language is essentially a rarity of expression of one sort or another, it is unreasonable to forbid apt and desirable grammatical forms merely because they are not read in the newspapers or heard at the dinner-table. And if once such unusual forms are admitted they will colour the keeping of the diction and invite a kindred vocabulary. It has lately become a fashion to use dialectal words in poetry. Such words are generally free from the stain of conventionality and since they are often better English words than their familiar synonyms, the only objection against them is that they are unknown or obscure, and have the same sort of effect as some of Burns' Scottish words have to English ears—they need translation. But if, for instance, such good old English words as inwit and wanhope should be rehabilitated (and they have been pushing up their heads for thirty years), we should gain a great deal; for we should not only win back towards a closer relationship with our older literature, but these words would soon differentiate themselves from their Latin synonyms conscience and despair, just as we have differentiated fatherly and paternal; and we should thus add to that

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subtlety in the expression of ideas which by like means has become a peculiar excellence of our tongue.

It might be urged that with Milton and Shelley, who were educated by Hellenic models and had come by reading and meditation to have panoramic views of History and Truth, it was natural to write at that height—their poetic diction may be the spontaneous utterance of their subconscious mind—but that it is nevertheless regrettable because common folk whom they might otherwise delight and instruct cannot understand it. This is a wrong notion. It was not Dr. Johnson's ignorance or deficient education that made him dislike Lycidas. It was his unpoetic mind that was at fault, and his taste in Music or Painting would probably have been at the same level. Moreover children do not resent what they cannot understand in Poetry, and they generally have a keener sense for beauty than Dr. Johnson had—indeed, if he would have become again as a little child, he might have liked Lycidas very well. Anatole France has put this matter so admirably that I will end my paper by transcribing the words in which he tells his own experience.

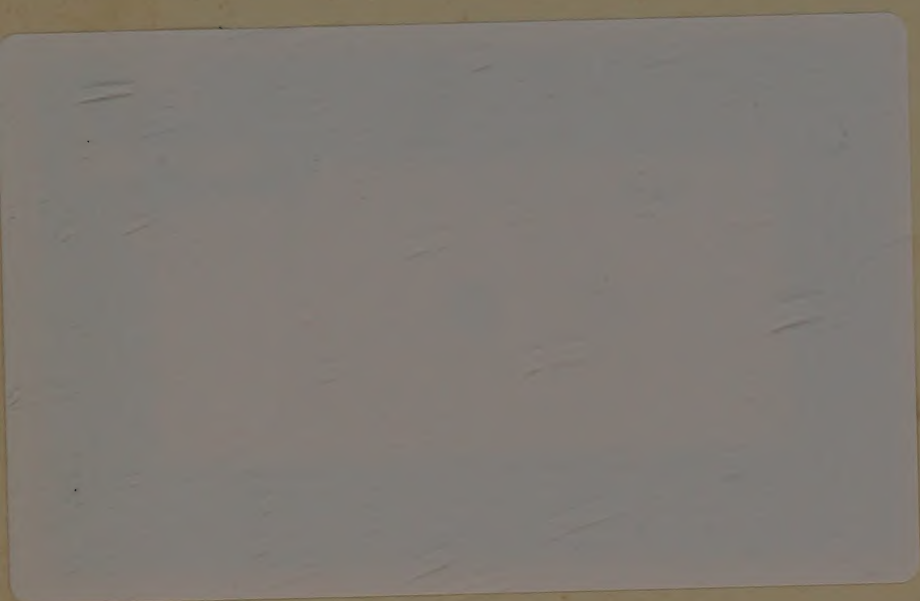
'Il y avait dans ce récit un grand nombre de termes que j'entendais pour la première fois et dont je ne savais pas la signification; mais l'ensemble m'en sembla si triste et si

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beau que je ressentis, à l'entendre, un frisson inconnu; le charme de la mélancolie m'était révélé par une trentaine de vers dont j'aurais été incapable d'expliquer le sens littéral. C'est que, à moins d'être vieux, on n'a pas besoin de beaucoup comprendre pour beaucoup sentir. Des choses obscures peuvent être des choses touchantes, et il est bien vrai que le vague plaît aux jeunes âmes.'

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